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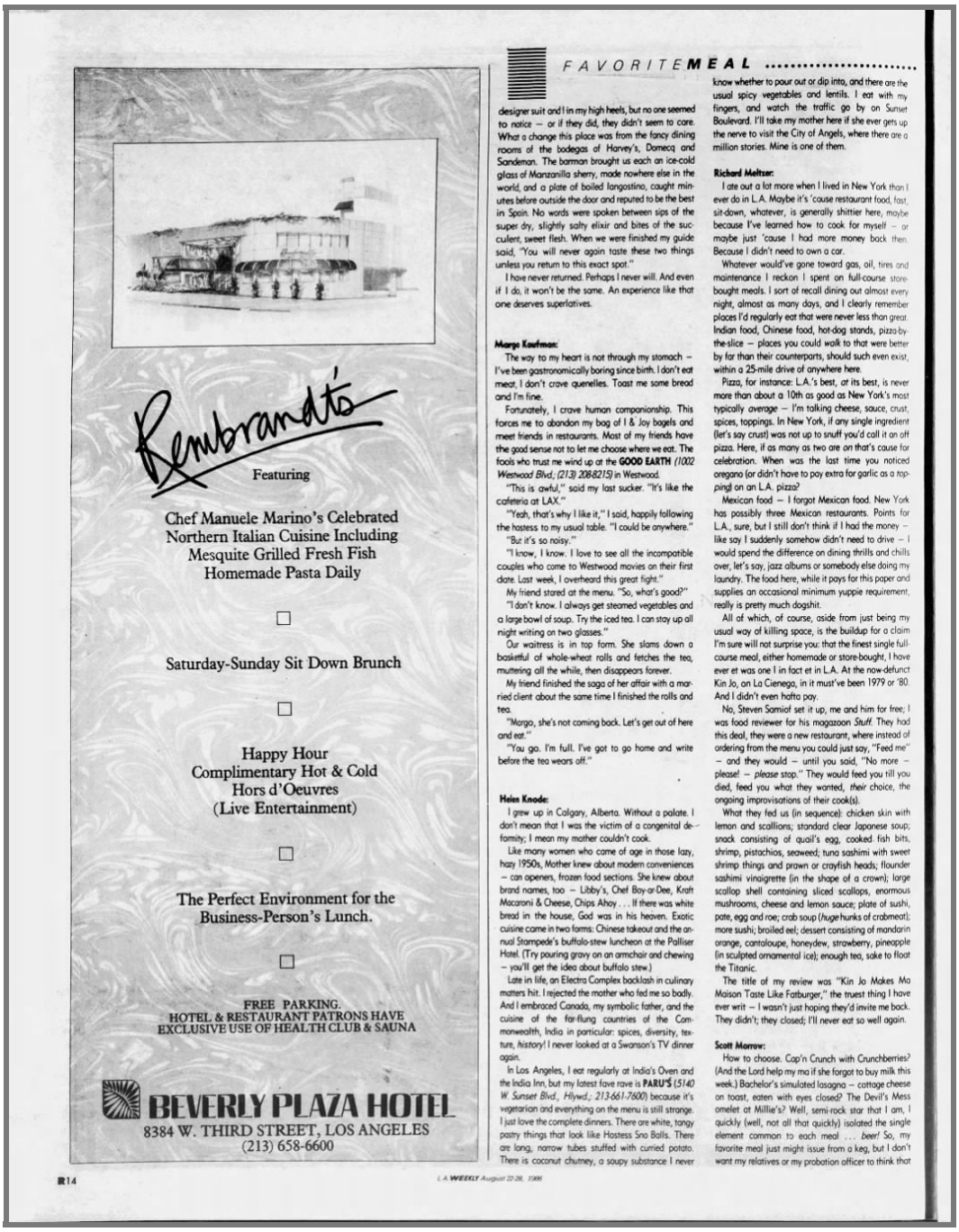

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FAVORITE MEAL

designer suit and I in my high heels, but no one seemed to notice — or if they did, they didn't seem to care. What a change this place was from the fancy dining rooms of the bodegas of Harvey's, Domecq and Sandeman. The barman brought us each an ice-cold glass of Manzanilla sherry, made nowhere else in the world, and a plate of boiled langostino, caught minutes before outside the door and reputed to be the best in Spain. No words were spoken between sips of the super dry, slightly salty elixir and bites of the succulent, sweet flesh. When we were finished my guide said, "You will never again taste these two things unless you return to this exact spot."

I have never returned. Perhaps I never will. And even if I do, it won't be the same. An experience like that one deserves superlatives.

Margo Kaufman:

The way to my heart is not through my stomach — I've been gastronomically boring since birth. I don't eat meat, I don't crave quenelles. Toast me some bread and I'm fine.

Fortunately, I crave human companionship. This forces me to abandon my bag of I & Joy bagels and meet friends in restaurants. Most of my friends have the good sense not to let me choose where we eat. The fools who trust me wind up at the **GOOD EARTH** *(1002 Westwood Blvd.; (213) 2088215)* in Westwood.

"This is awful," said my last sucker. "It's like the cafeteria at LAX."

"Yeah, that's why I like it," I said, happily following the hostess to my usual table. "I could be anywhere."

"But it's so noisy."

"I know, I know. I love to see all the incompatible couples who come to Westwood movies on their first date. Last week, I overheard this great fight."

My friend stared at the menu. "So, what's good?"

"I don't know. I always get steamed vegetables and a large bowl of soup. Try the iced tea. I can stay up all night writing on two glasses."

Our waitress is in top form. She slams down a basketful of whole-wheat rolls and fetches the tea, muttering all the while, then disappears forever.

My friend finished the saga of her affair with a married client about the same time I finished the rolls and tea.

"Margo, she's not coming back. Let's get out of here and eat."

"You go. I'm full. I've got to go home and write before the tea wears off."

Helen Knode:

I grew up in Calgary, Alberta. Without a palate. I don't mean that I was the victim of a congenital defformity; I mean my mother couldn't cook.

Like many women who came of age in those lazy, hazy 1950s, Mother knew about modern conveniences — can openers, frozen food sections. She knew about brand names, too — Libby's, Chef Boy-ar-Dee, Kraft Macaroni & Cheese, Chips Ahoy . . . If there was white bread in the house, God was in his heaven. Exotic cuisine came in two forms: Chinese takeout and the annual Stampede's buffalo-stew luncheon at the Palliser Hotel. (Try pouring gravy on an armchair and chewing — you'll get the idea about buffalo stew.)

Late in life, an Electra Complex backlash in culinary matters hit. I rejected the mother who fed me so badly. And I embraced Canada, my symbolic father, and the cuisine of the far-flung countries of the Commonwealth, India in particular: spices, diversity, texture, history! I never looked at a Swanson's TV dinner again.

In Los Angeles, I eat regularly at India's Oven and the India Inn, but my latest fave rave is **PARU'S** *(5140 W. Sunset Blvd., Hlywd.; 213-661-7600)* because it's vegetarian and everything on the menu is still strange. I just love the complete dinners. There are white, tangy pastry things that look like Hostess Sno Balls. There are long, narrow tubes stuffed with curried potato. There is coconut chutney, a soupy substance I never know whether to pour out or dip into, and there are the usual spicy vegetables and lentils. I eat with my fingers, and watch the traffic go by on Sunset Boulevard. I'll take my mother here if she ever gets up the nerve to visit the City of Angels, where there are a million stories. Mine is one of them.

Richard Meltzer:

I ate out a lot more when I lived in New York than I ever do in L.A. Maybe it's 'cause restaurant food, fast, sit-down, whatever, is generally shittier here, maybe because I've learned how to cook for myself — or maybe just 'cause I had more money back then. Because I didn't need to own a car.

Whatever would've gone toward gas, oil, tires and maintenance I reckon I spent on full-course store-bought meals. I sort of recall dining out almost every night, almost as many days, and I clearly remember places I'd regularly eat that were never less than great. Indian food, Chinese food, hot-dog stands, pizza-by-the-slice — places you could *walk* to that were better by far than their counterparts, should such even exist, within a 25-mile drive of anywhere here.

Pizza, for instance: L.A.'s best, *at* its best, is never more than about a 10th as good as New York's most typically *average* — I'm talking cheese, sauce, crust, spices, toppings. In New York, if any single ingredient (let's say crust) was not up to snuff you'd call it an off pizza. Here, if as many as two are on that's cause for celebration. When was the last time you noticed oregano (or didn't have to pay extra for garlic as a *topping*) on an L.A. pizza?

Mexican food — I forgot Mexican food. New York has possibly three Mexican restaurants. Points for L.A., sure, but I still don't think if I had the money — like say I suddenly somehow didn't need to drive — I would spend the difference on dining thrills and chills over, let's say, jazz albums or somebody else doing my laundry. The food here, while it pays for this paper and supplies an occasional minimum yuppie requirement, really is pretty much dogshit.

All of which, of course, aside from just being my usual way of killing space, is the buildup for a claim I'm sure will not surprise you: that the finest single full-course meal, either homemade or store-bought, I have ever et was one I in fact et in L.A. At the now-defunct Kin Jo, on La Cienega, in it must've been 1979 or '80. And I didn't even hafta pay.

No, Steven Samiof set it up, me and him for free; I was food reviewer for his magazoon *Stuff*. They had this deal, they were a new restaurant, where instead of ordering from the menu you could just say, "Feed me" — and they would — until you said, "No more — please! — *please* stop." They would feed you till you died, feed you what they wanted, *their* choice, the ongoing improvisations of their cook(s).

What they fed us (in sequence): chicken skin with lemon and scallions; standard clear Japanese soup; snack consisting of quail's egg, cooked fish bits, shrimp, pistachios, seaweed; tuna sashimi with sweet shrimp things and prawn or crayfish heads; flounder sashimi vinaigrette (in the shape of a crown); large scallop shell containing sliced scallops, enormous mushrooms, cheese and lemon sauce; plate of sushi, pate, egg and roe; crab soup (*huge* hunks of crabmeat); more sushi; broiled eel; dessert consisting of mandarin orange, cantaloupe, honeydew, strawberry, pineapple (in sculpted ornamental ice); enough tea, sake to float the Titanic.

The title of my review was "Kin Jo Makes Ma Maison Taste Like Fatburger," the truest thing I have ever writ — I wasn't just hoping they'd invite me back. They didn't; they closed; I'll never eat so well again.

Scott Morrow:

How to choose. Cap'n Crunch with Crunchberries? (And the Lord help my ma if she forgot to buy milk this week.) Bachelor's simulated lasagna — cottage cheese on toast, eaten with eyes closed? The Devil's Mess omelet at Millie's? Well, semi-rock star that I am, I quickly (well, not all that quickly) isolated the single element common to each meal . . . *beer!* So, my favorite meal just might issue from a keg, but I don't want my relatives or my probation officer to think that

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